

"INDONESIAN POLITICAL THINKING": A REVIEW*

Alfian

The last period of Dutch colonial rule in Indonesia was marked by a rapid growth of political self-consciousness as a result of major social and economic changes and the impact of Western-style education and the ideas of reformist Islam. While many new ideas were introduced and adopted, many traditional conceptions hitherto embraced largely unselfconsciously were now defined with increasing sharpness and defended in new ways. The growth of a "native" mass media enabled these differing styles of thought to be disseminated with unprecedented speed and on an unprecedented scale. One consequence was the growth of modern style political associations and the rise of self-conscious political thinkers. This period saw the birth of the Budi Utomo, Sarekat Islam, Muhammadiyah, Partai Komunis Indonesia, Taman Siswa, Nahdatul Ulama, Partai Nasional Indonesia, Parindra and many other such organizations. It also witnessed the emergence of thinkers such as Tjipto Mangunkusumo, Tjokroaminoto, Salim, Sutomo, Dewantara, Tan Malaka, Sukarno, Hatta, Natsir, Sjahrir and Takdir Alisjahbana. The consequence of these developments was to crystallize latent differences in political and philosophical outlook and to initiate a period of marked ideological debate and conflict. In the twenties, the main antagonism was between Islam and communism; in the thirties, the major polemic was between secular nationalism and Islam. Throughout there was tension between those who were attracted by the dynamism of Western culture and those who wished to revive and develop an indigenous political and philosophical tradition in opposition to the West.

The political thinking which emerged in Indonesia in the first twenty years after independence, which Herbert Feith and Lance Castles, two Australian scholars, have tried to collect and analyze in their book *Indonesian Political Thinking: 1945-1965* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970) had its roots in the thinking of the final decades of the colonial era. It is clear that the two editors fully understand this link. Their selection of writings includes many items from years not covered by the time period referred to in the title of the book. The most important schools of political thinking in the 1945-1965 period contained conceptions, formulations and substantive ideas which date from much earlier periods, many of which were never reformulated by the later thinkers. Although only a few persons explicitly championed these ideas in written form, nonetheless they continued to live on in society, as revealed by their clear influence

* The editors wish to express their appreciation to the National Institute of Economics and Social Science for permission to print this abridged and adapted English language version of a review article originally published under its auspices as part of Alfian, Masalah Mental, Aliran Politik dan Radikalisme dalam Masyarakat Indonesia (Djakarta: Leknas, 1970).

on the behavior of large numbers of its members. (One example is traditional Javanese political thinking; to represent this school, the two editors were compelled to cite works produced long before the period of the book itself--i.e., the writings of Ki Reditanaja and those of R. M. S. Soerjoekoesoemo.)

In reading a book which contains selections covering such a broad field, our attention is drawn mainly to two basic questions: what were the general criteria used to select the pieces included; and on what basis were particular authors chosen? The answer to the first question is contained in an introductory chapter written by Herbert Feith, who is widely regarded as the Australian scholar most knowledgeable about Indonesian politics. In common with the conventional wisdom, he conceives of the development of Indonesian political thought as divisible into three different periods.

In the first, the period of the armed revolution (1945-1949), the links with the previous colonial era were still very clearly in evidence. Political thought at this time was still the special prerogative of a tiny group of educated people--the men who had pioneered the national movement and who therefore regarded themselves as the natural leaders of the republic they were collectively establishing. As a result, the gap between the world of political thought and the world of political power was quite narrow. The thinkers who had high reputations in that period also played roles as politicians of the first rank--among them, Sukarno, Hatta, Sjahrir, Natsir and Tan Malaka. Congruent with the conditions then prevailing, the main theme of political thinking in this period of physical revolution was the search for a common basis for the national struggle. One characteristic product was the Pantja Sila.

According to Feith, only in the second or "liberal" period (1950-1959) did new political thinkers emerge alongside the veterans of the previous era. The liberal period was deeply marked by inter-party conflict and extreme ideological antagonism. This evidently caused a number of younger political thinkers to free themselves, though rarely with complete success, from participation or direct involvement in the realities of the struggle for power. These men were obsessed by a need to observe, to follow closely and even to make judgments on the development of the political chess game. Feith refers to this group, composed mainly of journalists, writers and student leaders, as "unattached intellectuals." (Since he evidently has in mind people like Sudjatmoko, Rosihan Anwar and Nugroho Notosusanto, one can ask whether this label is completely appropriate.)

The third period, the period of Guided Democracy (1959-1965), was marked by the compulsory acceptance of the late President Sukarno's political ideas, such as Socialism à la Indonesia and Nasakom. "Never before had government leaders insisted on repeated affirmations of support for their ideas as a condition for participation in legal politics" (p. 11). As a result, Sukarno's political ideas not only dominated, and indeed almost monopolized, public discussion, but also thinkers with ideas incompatible with his were silenced.

Few if any would disagree with this periodization. But with regard to the second question--which involves the categorization of different streams of political thought--many readers may feel stirred to debate or criticism. Most would agree with Feith that indigenous

(particularly Hindu-Javanese), Islamic and Western traditions formed the prime sources for the various streams of political thought which emerged during the twenty year span covered by the book. But people may disagree with the five major streams of political thought which he identifies as having developed during this period.

The five streams of thought he identifies are: Javanese tradition, Islam, radical nationalism, communism and democratic socialism. Although Javanese tradition has never provided the ideological basis of a major political party or grouping, it has clearly influenced a number of important parties, such as the PNI, NU, and even, to a certain point, the PKI. The former Partai Indonesia Raya could perhaps be considered as a party strongly influenced by Javanese tradition; this was also the case with Gerinda (a local party which once had a significant following in Jogjakarta). Islam served as a basis for both the NU and the Masjumi, but, within both, the influence of other political streams is conspicuous. If one can see in Masjumi the penetration of democratic socialist thinking, in the NU the influence of Javanese tradition is strikingly clear. Radical nationalism is conceived as having given birth to and pervaded the PNI; yet, at the same time, the PNI has also been influenced by other currents of political thought. While the impact of Javanese tradition is very obvious, democratic socialist ideas evidently also had their effect. Feith observes further that the PKI, in addition to its communist ideology, was also affected, although possibly only to a limited degree, by Javanese tradition. As in the case of Javanese tradition, the democratic socialist stream never succeeded in inspiring a single large political grouping, though it did manage to exert a definite influence in at least two of the major parties, the PNI and Masjumi. The most clear-cut manifestation of the democratic socialist stream was the Indonesian Socialist Party (PSI) which Feith believes had considerable influence among urban intellectuals though it did not have a broad mass following equivalent to those of the PNI, Masjumi, NU and PKI.

According to Feith, the PKI and the PSI were the most successful, relatively speaking, in shedding the influence of tradition, and they therefore appear to be more modern than other parties. Similarly, though not to quite the same degree, the Masjumi also had a relatively modern orientation. Feith places the PNI somewhat lower than the Masjumi on this scale and lowest of all the NU. With regard to the left-right axis of Indonesian political thought, Feith puts the PKI on the far left, the Masjumi on the far right, the PNI in the middle and a bit to the left, and the NU on the right but somewhat towards the center.

In its broad outline, Feith's categorization has considerable descriptive value and can serve as a guide for understanding and exploring problems of Indonesian politics in their totality. But the question arises, is this the only tool that can be employed for this purpose? Feith himself admits that there are other possibilities--for example, Sukarno's categorization of political streams as nationalist, Islamic and marxist. If this is so, is Feith's framework better than the others or worse? May it not be possible to propose another framework which could possibly be an improvement on his? One way of evaluating Feith's categories is to isolate and discuss their weaknesses, if they exist, and then try to propose a more adequate framework.

One of Feith's important contributions is his identification of Javanese tradition as a stream of political thought with an important role in Indonesian society. The structure of its influence within the PNI, the NU and the PKI may clarify for us some of the reasons why cooperation between these three parties was possible under the Sukarno regime. But what is identifiable as the Javanese tradition represents a style of political behavior or an ingrained mental attitude evinced in the everyday life of a section of society rather than an explicit ideology which has been revived and given a new lease on life.

Perhaps one can compare its position with "Islamic traditionalism," insofar as this latter is distinguishable from "Islamic modernism." Like Javanese tradition, "Islamic traditionalism" is really more a style of political behavior and an everyday mental set displayed by a section of society rather than what can properly be called a type of political thought. Adherents of Islamic traditionalism may possibly find some concepts of Islamic modernism politically or ideologically useful, but observation shows that in their everyday behavior, they continue to differ conspicuously from people who are fully committed to Islamic modernism.

Since Feith bases his isolation of Javanese tradition as a separate stream of its own primarily on the political behavior or everyday mental attitudes of a section of society, then some would be inclined to argue that by these same criteria, Islamic traditionalism forms a separate entity, distinguishable from Islamic modernism and other streams of political thinking. That Feith fails to deal with Islamic and Javanese traditionalism in a consistent way, may be regarded as a weakness in his framework.

One of the justifications which Feith gives for including democratic socialism as a separate current of thought is that it clearly influenced a number of important political forces, such as the PNI and Masjumi. As we have seen above, this is more or less the same justification used for isolating the Javanese traditionalist current. Feith forgets that other currents may have had a no less significant impact on certain political groups; for example, careful investigation may reveal that, in this period, radical nationalism had an important influence on the PKI or, conversely, marxism on the PNI. The same might be said about the possible influence of radical nationalism in Masjumi (for example, among former members of Permi, in West Sumatra), or, conversely, of Islam in the PNI.

This kind of justification, moreover, conveys the impression that political forces based on the democratic socialist current (for example, the PSI) were immune from influence by other political currents. Yet, as we know, just like the PNI, the Masjumi and other parties, the PSI too contained "boxes" with differing contents. Some PSI members felt close to Islamic modernism, some to radical nationalism, while others perhaps were attached to the core of traditional philosophy or something else. Furthermore, although probably each had a sense of what democratic socialism meant, it is quite clear that they could not agree sufficiently to evolve a concept of it which all could accept. It is not too much to say, I think, that democratic socialism is among the most amorphous currents of political thought in Indonesia.

The case that the democratic socialist current, though it failed to generate a political organization any stronger than the PSI, still

had a relatively important political influence, can also, it seems to me, be made for other political currents--for example the Murba philosophy of Tan Malaka or the Christian thought expressed by Catholic and Protestant groups. A number of scholars regard the role of Tan Malaka's thinking as of considerable importance both in the early years of independence and during the greater part of the Guided Democracy period. Similarly, some experts may regard the Christian philosophy as having exerted an influence far beyond its actual political party base. With these considerations in mind, one can understand that some readers may have serious reservations about the inclusion of democratic socialism as one of the five major currents of political thought in Indonesia--particularly as it means denigrating the significance of other currents which they may feel to be no less influential. Feith's division of what Sukarno used to call the marxist current into communism and democratic socialism may indeed help to clarify the difference between the PKI and the PSI. But, at the same time, it may give democratic socialism (or the PSI) an importance unwarranted by the facts and thereby undervalue other currents or political forces.

This framework, furthermore, does not explain the real position of the Pantja Sila. Anyone who looks at Feith's chart of the currents of political thought in Indonesia can conjecture the place of the Republic's official ideology on it in accordance with his own knowledge and perspective. It is very possible that the reason for Herbert Feith's failure to locate the Pantja Sila on his chart lies in the fact that, up to the end of the period covered by the book, the meaning of Pantja Sila itself was still subject to conflicting interpretations. Is that not still the case?

Feith himself admits that he has also been unable to place the military on his "map" and while he can locate former President Sukarno in the radical nationalist "box," he confesses that he was not able to find an appropriate place for leaders such as Hatta and General Nasution. In brief, this indicates that his "map" is far from comprehensive, though it is still useful in spite of its limited applicability.

A third criterion or major theme in determining the editors' selection of items was that of the issue areas or problems which frequently were the subject of debate between political thinkers. These are identified as: the problem of national identity; the problem of national unity and regional groups; the problem of the military; the problem of the economy; the problem of the Chinese minority; and the problem of Indonesia in the world. Aside from these issues, they also bring out the problem of national unity and the communists, but, amazingly, they ignore the problem of national unity and Islam. Whether one likes it or not, it is an objective that the relationship of Islam to the problem of national unity is frequently, as is the case with communism, subject to conflicting interpretations. By neglecting to include this problem in their book, the editors have cast some doubt on their objectivity.

Another aspect of the book which may well elicit controversy, debate or criticism is the type of writings selected and the choice of authors. The two editors indicate that their choice was limited, in the first instance, to writings which they felt had exerted considerable influence on the political thinking of the period, and only secondarily to those of intrinsically high intellectual quality.

"Much of the intellectually powerful political writing of the period had very little influence, conversely, some of the period's most influential ideas were never presented except in the most hackneyed and sloganistic form" (pp. v-vi). Many readers will sympathize with the difficulties and limitations faced by the two editors in making their selection while at the same time believing that the choice could have been better.

With regard to communist thought, for example, four of the five pieces included were authored by D. N. Aidit while the fifth is a Self-Criticism written about 1966. Those who have studied the development of communism in Indonesia over the twenty years since independence may find this choice unsatisfactory, primarily because important leaders such as Alimin, Tan Ling Djie, etc. were around before Aidit took over the PKI in the 1950's. Furthermore, although the PKI was far more monolithic than other parties, it cannot be said that writing about communist conceptions was completely monopolized by Aidit.

A similar criticism can be made with regard to treatment of Islamic thought--three of the pieces chosen are from Mohammad Natsir while another is a piece on Islam and Democracy written in 1948 by R. A. A. Wiranata Koesoemah, the former Wali Negara of Pasundan. Given the number of Islamic writers and thinkers, the question naturally arises, why choose Wiranata Koesoemah? In this context, one recalls that Wertheim also used the writings of Wiranata Koesoemah as a primary Muslim source when seeking to analyze the problem of Islamic reform in his book, *Indonesian Society in Transition*. Insofar as Wertheim's treatment of this problem is unsatisfactory because of his rash use of inappropriate sources, the same criticism can also be directed towards Herbert Feith and Lance Castles.

One can find similar weaknesses in the treatment of other issue areas. On the question of Guided Democracy, for example, from the totality of writings chosen (including pieces by Sukarno, Hatta and Sakirman), we find not a single piece originating from Masjumi or any of its leaders. Yet Masjumi was an important force which criticized or opposed the ideas of President Sukarno.

On the same lines, is there no better or more representative sample of Protestant thought than the piece included here--an article originating from the Evangelical Church of Kalimantan? If the work of a relative unknown like Soerasto Sastrosoewignjo is accepted for inclusion, why not the writings of a very well known journalist like Mochtar Lubis? If the writings of Selosumardjan, who is widely known as one of our senior sociologists, deserves inclusion, why not the work of the late Drijarkara, a philosopher and thinker widely known beyond his own Catholic circle? What is the justification for including the writing of Widjojo Nitisastro, an economic expert par excellence, in a collection of articles on the theme of political thought? These questions point up other weaknesses in the book.

Some of the criticisms which I am suggesting here may be regarded as insufficient or excessive. Feith and Castles, however, themselves clearly reckoned that certain aspects of their work would be seen by some scholars as weak and open to criticism. It is understandable, therefore, that at the beginning of the book, the two editors are very careful to protect themselves: "It is not for us to say how representative we have succeeded in making our collection. It would

be surprising if our attachment to particular pieces and particular styles of thought, and friendship with particular writers had not affected our choices. Indeed, our attempt to be representative is necessarily based on subjective notions of the relative importance of particular groupings, and subjectivity certainly enters even more fully into our search for quality. In addition, we may well be vulnerable to the charge, which Indonesians often lay against Westerners, of concentrating on the variety and conflict in the Indonesian scene at the expense of the unity. In any case, here are our selections. Let us hope that Indonesian political thinkers will take issue with us on the picture that we presented" (p. viii).

In spite of these shortcomings, the book nonetheless has great value. It represents the only reasonably comprehensive collection of political writing for the 1945-1965 period. It also makes a number of important points. One of these is that the various streams of thought it presents display great differences in the level and scope of their development. The radical nationalist current, for example, was overwhelmingly influenced by the thinking of the late Sukarno. Although there are other thinkers in this current, most of them followed or developed ideas he had already outlined. None of them can therefore be regarded as fully independent thinkers. More or less the same can be said about the modernist Islamic current, which was dominated by the thinking of Mohammad Natsir. Although there were other thinkers whose ideas did not fully coincide with Natsir's, their influence was not nearly as widespread as his, and most of them were under his influence. In the case of the radical nationalist and modernist Islamic currents, political scientists will perhaps find it easy to analyze their inner development by studying the changing ideas and perspectives of Sukarno and Natsir. Changes in the communist current can also be demonstrated by studying differences in official party interpretations of Marxism-Leninism. The difficulty arises, I think, when we turn our attention to the development of thinking about democratic socialism. There are so many thinkers in this stream that it is difficult to discover who should be taken as the appropriate point for comparison. Possibly Sjahrir can be regarded as a "nominal" leader, acceptable to all groups within this current, but his writings are, as far as I can see, too limited to serve as a standard of judgment. As a result, we remain in confusion and uncertainty about the meaning of democratic socialism as an authentic style of political thought.

Secondly, the book points up some general characteristics shared by all the different currents. In his introduction, Feith says that the various types of political thought which arose in the 1945-1965 period had three relatively comparable features. In the first place, they were all typically moralistic. Very few political thinkers looked at certain aspects of politics as autonomous, neutral, and outside moral considerations. As a result, they tended to focus their attention primarily on the moral strengths and weaknesses of leaders rather than, for instance, seeing the political system as a process or a mechanism. Their deep concern with normative matters caused them to stress primarily the problem of *what* had to be done--that is, what was morally correct. Very few were attracted to the problem of *how*--the search for effective and practical means for solving the problems they encountered. Secondly, Indonesian political thinkers very often tended to regard the political public as a unity rather than as a society full of different kinds of conflicting interests. Consequently, society was most often seen in

terms of the relationship between the leaders and the people rather than from the perspective of a pluralism of aspirations. It is true that conflict between parties and ideologies had a certain place in their thinking, but, more frequently, political thinkers viewed society holistically, as a unity from which their thinking derived and on which it was based. This explains why most of the thinkers failed to perceive certain very real political problems which existed within a pluralistic society. Finally, the editors suggest that, in general, Indonesian political thought was characterized by its optimism. Most writers regarded the future of their country and their people with a sense of confidence that it would be an improvement over the present. According to Feith, they were more confident than Western observers for the most part. This optimism frequently caused them to overlook certain problems being directly experienced by the great majority of society, such as, for example, the danger of overpopulation, growing poverty, and the increasing social gap between the "haves" and the "have nots."

Few would probably deny the relevance of this characterization of Herbert Feith's for most of the writings of the Indonesian political thinkers covered in this 505-page volume. At the same time, while it is difficult to give a clear picture of Indonesian political thought in the period from 1966 to the present, many observers may be inclined to see certain changes taking place in content, style and character. For example, alongside those who still conceive of Indonesia as a unity, there are now those who have the courage to see it as a pluralistic society. Although there are still many thinkers who seem unready to consider some political problems as being outside morality, there are also some observers who have tried to analyze them on a neutral and realistic basis. It is still true, I think, that optimism continues to be a general characteristic of Indonesian political thought, but, at least in some quarters, this optimism has begun to take on a more cautious tone. Such thinkers continue to be optimistic, but they also realize the real dangers which can arise from such problems as the unemployment of intellectuals, overpopulation, failures in development and excessive dependence on foreign economic aid.

All of this shows, if I may say so, a certain development in the character of Indonesian political thought. The appearance of this book will make it easier for us to gauge changes and developments in our political thinking in the future.